

June 15, 2004

Dear Secretary Norton:

As sponsors of legislation pending in Congress that would protect some of America's last wild public lands, we are writing to urge you to suspend federal oil and gas leases sales in areas that would be covered by our legislative proposals. While we are supportive of domestic energy development, we believe there must be a balance between the imperatives for energy development and conservation.

Recent news reports and the Bureau of Land Management's own data indicate that though vast amounts of federal acreage are under lease to oil and gas companies, a relatively small proportion of that acreage is actually in production. For example, the attached documents – prepared by the BLM – indicate that as of March 4 of this year, nearly 42,000,000 acres of BLM lands were under lease. Yet the BLM report, *Public Rewards from Public Lands 2003*, indicates that only about 11,000,000 acres are actually in production.

The table also indicates that although the BLM issued 4,067 drilling permits in fiscal year 2003, only 2,878 were actually used by those operators.

Given the surplus of leased acreage and unused drilling permits, your Department can afford to be circumspect with its leasing program, setting aside those areas where Congress has not taken the opportunity act upon our legislative proposals without interrupting the flow of federal oil and gas resources to our economy.

We ask once again that you direct the BLM to forego the issuance of federal oil and gas leases on the federal lands addressed in America's Redrock Wilderness Act (H.R. 1796), the Colorado Wilderness Act (H.R. 2305), and the Northern Rockies Ecosystem Act (H.R. 1105). We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Diana DeGette
Member of Congress

Christopher Shays
Member of Congress

Maurice Hinchey
Member of Congress